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United States Senate

June 16, 2011

COMMITTEES: APPROPRIATIONS

BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack Secretary United States Department of Agriculture 1400 Independence Ave., SW

Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On June 10, 2011, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback wrote requesting that you declare 25 additional Kansas counties agricultural disaster areas as a result of production losses caused by drought, wild fires, and high winds. I respectfully request that you immediately grant that request.

Ongoing drought conditions have hampered agricultural operations in these counties since the beginning of this year. By declaring this area a disaster, farmers and ranchers in the affected counties will become eligible for emergency loans administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA). In addition to the emergency loans, access to other aid through the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments Program may become available. Such financial assistance is needed to help ensure the continuity of agricultural operations in these counties.

As evidenced by USDA's previous emergency declaration of 30 Kansas counties in May, the lack of rainfall is an ongoing challenge in Kansas. Farmers and ranchers across parts of the state are feeling the effects of these exceedingly dry conditions. In the coming days, weeks, and months, I anticipate that local FSA offices in these counties can expect to start receiving producer requests for the release of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres for emergency grazing and haying. Many counties in the state are approaching or have already achieved the D2 drought threshold on the U.S. Drought Monitor, thereby qualifying them to apply for the emergency grazing designation, while others have achieved the D3 drought threshold on the U.S. Drought Monitor, thereby qualifying them to apply for the emergency haying designation. As these requests are formally made by the Kansas FSA State Executive Director, I ask that you expeditiously review and approve these requests in a timely fashion.

Following conclusion of primary nesting season on July 15th, emergency haying option should be made available for all qualifying counties, including those counties already approved for emergency grazing. Swift approval of emergency grazing and haying requests will help livestock producers avoid having to sell breeding livestock due to forage shortages caused by drought conditions. This is important because according to USDA data, current U.S. cattle and calves inventories are at the lowest level since the 1950's.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. If you would like any more information or require any assistance, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Moran

JM:wr